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INFO RUEHTH/AMEMBASSY ATHENS 8836  
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DEPARTMENT FOR INR/R/MR, EUR/SE, EUR/PD, NEA/PD, DRL  
JCS PASS J-5/CDR S. WRIGHT

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SUBJECT: ANKARA MEDIA REACTION REPORT

MONDAY, APRIL 21, 2008

#### In Today's Papers

##### PACE Releases Declaration on AKP Closure Case

All papers reported over the weekend the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) released a declaration which expressed concern about the closure suit against Turkey's ruling party, the AKP. The PACE statement, however, has caused controversy since last Wednesday, when Luis Maria Puig, the head of PACE, told the press the Turkish delegation, led by the ruling AKP, demanded a statement condemning the case. The AKP denied such charges, but the opposition CHP attacked the government for seeking international support in what was an internal matter. The declaration signed by the leaders of the Christian Democrat, Socialist, Liberal and United European Left groups in PACE urges Turkey to pass reforms to protect political parties from closure. The declaration says, "It is unacceptable to close down political parties who are not linked to violence." Islamist-oriented Zaman sees it as a "powerful message" for Turkey because the declaration was signed by all political groups represented in PACE. Leftist-nationalist Cumhuriyet, however, recalls on Saturday, "The declaration was released after the request from AKP officials." Mainstream Hurriyet however notes on Saturday that, "The declaration, signed by only 21 of the 370 members of PACE, did not meet the expectations of the AKP who allegedly requested it." Papers say the declaration also emphasizes the importance of respecting the independence of the judiciary.

##### European Parliament to Vote on "Turkey Report"

All papers report the European Parliament's Committee on Foreign Affairs will vote on the "Turkey Report" drafted by PACE reporter Ria Oomen-Ruijten. The report urges the Turkish government and the parliament to carry out, "as a priority," the promised reform of Article 301 of the Turkish Penal Code. The report expresses concern about the lawsuit banning the AKP and calls on the Constitutional Court to comply with European standards and the Venice Criteria. The report encourages Turkish authorities to pursue investigations into the Ergenekon network in order to "fully uncover the shadowy organization's networks which reach into the state structures, and

to bring those involved to justice." In addition, the report, "urges the Turkish government to launch, as a matter of priority, a political initiative towards a lasting settlement to the Kurdish issue," and calls on the pro-Kurdish DTP "to engage constructively in the quest for a political solution to the Kurdish issue within the democratic Turkish state." It urges the PKK to unconditionally lay down its arms. On Cyprus, the report says, "the withdrawal of Turkish forces would facilitate the negotiation of a settlement."

#### Justice Committee of Turkish Parliament Approves Changes to Article 301

Papers report over the weekend the Turkish Parliament's Justice Committee approved changes to Article 301 of the penal code on Friday. According to the Committee's recommendations, the authority to permit the launch of legal procedures related to Article 301 should reside with the Justice Ministry, and not to the President as initially expected. Article 301 of the Turkish Penal Code criminalizes insulting "Turkishness." Under the changes proposed by the government, the term "Turkishness" will be replaced by the "Turkish nation." The bill lowers the maximum punishment from three to two years, which opens the way for the postponement of the prison term of those convicted under Article 301.

#### Editorial Commentary on Revision of Penal Code Article 301

##### "Article 301 and the Government"

Oktay Eksi wrote in mainstream Hurriyet (4/20): "If it were not for the AKP closure case, changes to Article 301 would not be on the agenda. Prior to the closure case, the government was completely reluctant to change this notorious law. Thanks to the EU, the changes are now on the agenda. The sad part of this story is that this mistake was corrected despite the government. Turkish NGOs have worked tirelessly to encourage the government to expand

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legislation to protect freedoms and human rights. While the government did not take action based on Turks' suggestions, the government did take action based on the EU's suggestions. Our wish is to see Turkey move forward on matters related to freedom and democracy through its own impetus before facing international pressure. When and if that happens, we will give the government a standing ovation."

Turkish Cabinet to Discuss May 1 as Official Holiday  
Milliyet, Sabah, and Radikal report Turkey's Council of Ministers will decide Monday whether to declare May 1 as an official holiday. Last week, AKP lawmaker Agah Kafkas submitted a bill to parliament to declare May 1 as "Unity and Solidarity Day." Labor Minister Faruk Celik said several labor unions asked Prime Minister Erdogan to declare May 1 an official holiday.

PKK Terrorist Captured in Diyarbakir  
All papers report police captured a PKK terrorist and two suspected accomplices in Diyarbakir. The suspects were allegedly preparing for bomb attacks in the mainly Kurdish southeastern city. A statement from the Governor's Office said the main suspect was trained in PKK camps outside Turkey. Police seized 451 grams of plastic explosives, hand grenade fuses, four laptops, and three mobile phones.

Meanwhile, four PKK members and one Turkish soldier were killed in clashes in Kagizman on the eastern border province of Kars.

#### Editorial Commentary on Global Food Crisis

##### "Power, Energy and the Future"

Soli Ozel wrote in mainstream Sabah (4/20): "Given the nature and frequent number of disasters, the world appears headed toward an apocalyptic period. This global food crisis comes with potentially grave consequences. It is possible this time that the global food crisis will be more devastating than ever before. In addition, the world population is heavily condensed in the cities instead of rural areas. In the event of a crisis, population density plus a lack of an educated populace in these cities could lead to more violence. It is also incorrect to assume a food crisis will only affect less

developed nations. Indeed, a crisis of this scale will create mass migration, which will be enough to create a global security issue. Food and energy are the main sources of upcoming global problems, including potential wars. Changing the course of such a disaster requires massive change in consumption habits across the world."

TV News:  
CNN Turk

#### Domestic News

- On April 23, President Abdullah Gul will host a luncheon for the leaders of political parties that have seats in the parliament.
- Austrian Foreign Minister Ursula Plassnik will visit Turkey on Monday as the guest of her Turkish counterpart Foreign Minister Ali Babacan.
- Meat prices are expected to climb at least 20 this summer.

#### International News

- The third expanded ministerial meeting between Iraq, its neighbors and permanent members of the UN Security Council will be held in Kuwait on Tuesday.
- United Nations' food envoy Jean Ziegler said global food price rises are leading to a "silent mass murder."

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- On Sunday, Pope Benedict XVI prayed for peace at the World Trade Center's Ground Zero. Afterwards, he met with a group of families of victims of the September 11 attacks.

WILSON